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ABSTRACT

Implementation of an honors program is carefully explained, including course content, evaluation, and helpful suggestions for administrators contemplating similar programs. The need for such programs is apparent as high schools are sending to college students who have been involved in advanced, accelerated, or enriched classes and who are motivated to attain a high level of academic success. Colleges must have programs available for academically talented students. In this situation, high school counselors were asked to identify potential honors applicants according to established criteria with a deliberately loose structure to allow various degrees of competence to be recognized. Class size was held to thirty students and some flexibility in schedule and format was allowed. After the first session of composition and American government, students' subjective, written evaluation of the two courses was extremely positive. Concrete endorsement of the program came from the high rate of return for a second session of the courses. Future planning includes the present courses intact, plus an additional course in humanities. Although adequate planning and cooperation are necessary, the ultimate success of an honors program must come from enthusiastic and inspirational instructional leadership. Also, if honors work is to be special, the need for special administrative arrangements must be acknowledged and reconciled. (MN)

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ST. PETERSBURG INITIATES AN HONORS PROGRAM

A. D. Pollock

[1971]

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to explain why and how St. Petersburg Junior College (SPJC) set up an Honors program for both the St. Petersburg Campus and the Clearwater Campus. Although the planning was done by cross-campus committee, this explanation covers only the implementation of Honors on the St. Petersburg Campus.

Planning

Beginning in July, 1968, the Ad Hoc Committee on Honors, under the leadership of Mr. E. L. Noel, Jr., Dean of Instruction, St. Petersburg Campus, and Mr. Joseph Madden, Chairman of English, St. Petersburg Campus, began investigating the feasibility of an Honors Program for scholastically superior students. Although the term "program" has been used consistently since the first discussions started, planning and implementation centered around the idea of special sections of four general education courses, Composition (EH 140-141) and American Government (GT 152-153).

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During the two years of planning, several factors emerged to encourage St. Petersburg Junior College to implement Honors work for academically talented students. Probably most important was the fact that the local high schools are sending to the college students who have been involved in advanced, accelerated, or enriched classes, students who have already been motivated to attain a high level of academic success. In a meeting with some of this type of student already enrolled at the college -- students who represented campus government, student publications, and Phi Theta Kappa -- the committee learned that the young people were disappointed in not having the opportunity to continue the kind of special classes which they had enjoyed in high school. The students also explained

that often they were bored in the general education courses, which were aimed at the "C"-average student. One particular study showed what had happened to such high-potential students: of 48 freshmen who had scored higher than 450 (possible 495) on the Florida Twelfth Grade Placement Test (FTGPT), 13 ended the freshman year with a Grade Point Average (GPA) under 2.0 (4.0=A) and 19 ended with a GPA under 3.0. These 32 students had not achieved according to their potential, a fact which reinforced the committee's belief that Honors work would stimulate some highly talented students to be more successful. Furthermore, the committee believed that with the spiraling cost of university education, SPJC would be registering even more of these very capable high school graduates.

Another aspect of the planning for Honors work has a review of the literature on the subject, of which there was not a great deal that applied to a commuter, open-door junior college. The greatest help, for which much thanks is owed, came from Junior College of Broward County, Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. Mrs. Neda G. Hill, Director of Honors, Mrs. Mary Jo Carl, instructor of Honors English, Mr. Ralph Clark, instructor of Honors World Civilization, and Mr. Ron Norval, Director of Counseling, were most generous in sharing their time and ideas so that SPJC might have the benefit of their experience with Honors work at Broward. Encouraged by their advice and their success, the ad hoc committee requested permission of Dr. Philip Fredrickson, Dean of Academic Affairs, to implement Honors work beginning Session (Semester) 1, 1970.

Implementation

Recruiting and Selection of Students

With the cooperation of the high school counselors, active recruiting of the seniors began in April, 1970. Initial contact with the schools was made by the Chairman of the Department of Directed Studies, on behalf of the English and Social Science departments. High school counselors then identified

potential Honors applicants, according to the following criteria set up by the ad hoc committee:

1. have a minimum score of 400 (possible 495) on the FTGPT, or
2. have a minimum score of 90 in the respective subject area of the FTGPT, or
3. be in the top 10% of the high school graduating class, or
4. have a strong recommendation from a former teacher.

Any student who met at least one of the four criteria was eligible to apply for Honors work. The criteria were deliberately structured loosely so that it was almost impossible for a competent student not to be eligible.

Once each high school had identified potential candidates, the high school counselors arranged for a large-group meeting, at which time the Honors Program was explained to the students by the instructors who had been selected by their department chairmen to lead the Honors sections, Mr. Earl Kohler, instructor of American Government, and Mr. Donald Tighe, instructor of Composition. Each student was also given a brochure which described the content and methods to be used in the two courses. Part of the brochure was a business-reply card on which the student indicated his name and address and the Honors course(s) he was interested in attending. These cards had to be returned to the college by May 1. Upon receipt of the card, the Chairman of the Department of Directed Studies sent a letter to the student confirming his application and requesting an interview with the student. The interviews were completed in the month of June, and then students were enrolled in the Honors sections.

The original plan for Honors was to have one section each of Composition (EH 140) and American Government I (GT 152) in Session I, 1970. The enthusiasm of the high school seniors pleased the committee immensely, because after the interviewing had been completed, the committee had 52 applicants (22 male, 30 female, from 6 public and 2 parochial high schools) for

Honors work, and 34 of those youngsters had requested both courses. Once again the administration of the college, in the person of Dr. Fredrickson, Dean of Academic Affairs, granted a committee request, this time to add a second section of Honors for each course. This action enabled every Honors applicant to be placed in at least one section; eight students were registered in both EH 140 and GT 152.

Scheduling

Placement of the applicants into the four Honors sections was done by the Chairman of the Department of Directed Studies. Every high school was represented in each section, in proportion to the number of applicants from that school. By gender, the courses consisted of 13 male - 17 female in the two English sections and 16 male - 14 female in the two American Government sections.

As an experiment in scheduling, the English sections met in the traditional pattern of three 50-minute periods per week, whereas the American Government sections met in two 75-minute periods per week. Evaluation of this experiment will be made at the close of the second academic year; especially interesting should be the observations of the students enrolled in both English and American Government.

A special meeting place for Honors sections was provided in the Administration building by Dean E.L. Noel, Jr., who set aside a conference room furnished with comfortable, cushioned arm chairs and large conference tables. Since this room was used only by them, the students and the instructors could meet informally before and after classes, which increased the rapport developed in the seminar situation.

Instruction

A thumbnail sketch of a course cannot do justice to the content, the teaching techniques, and the student-instructor enthusiasm. However, the reader can understand the general idea and tone.

EH 140

This is the first general education English course required for students in the university parallel program, and expository writing is the core of the instruction. Thus, the Honors sections also emphasized expository writing, with the aim of having the students, especially through the stimulus of peer evaluation, accomplish superior standards of writing.

The two texts or resource materials were an authoritative rhetoric and Harper's periodical.

The students assumed several responsibilities in the Honors work. First, each class member kept a writer's journal for the first six weeks of the course. Entries were made each day, with the idea that this journal would become a storehouse of ideas for future essays. The instructor checked the journals every two weeks.

Second, every two weeks each student wrote a 500-1000 word essay on a topic of personal interest; however, all students were assigned the same type of essay: personal, argumentative, etc. Before the instructor saw these papers, each student wrote a critique of a classmate's essay. In the course of the session each young person wrote eight essays and eight critiques; he always constructively critized a different person's paper each time. Then the instructor reviewed both the essay and the student critique of that essay. Finally, each student revised his essay for the instructor, who graded that revision.

The third responsibility of the students was to read assigned articles in Harper's. These readings served as illustrations of contemporary writing styles and techniques and as a basis of discussion of ideas important to college youth.

How did the students and their instructor evaluate the Honors EH 140 classes? Student evaluation came in two forms: in registration for Honors EH 141 for Session II and in a very

concrete manner. In the written evaluations the students almost unanimously listed the following as positive aspects of the course: teacher-student rapport; student-student identification; student critique of peer's paper; conference room, seminar atmosphere; use of Harper's. The most frequent negative comments were about the writer's journal, the length of many of the articles in Harper's and the lack of use of other periodicals.

The instructor's evaluation of the course parallels the students' evaluations. Very important was the fact that each 15-student section developed a sense of "a community of scholars"usually not found in a freshman class. The discussion of Harper's readings and the peer criticisr of student writings were the bases of this group cohesiveness. The enthusiasm for and ability to do peer criticism were demonstrated in two ways: the written critiques were often longer than the original essay, and in about half the cases the instructor concurred fully with student critique. Also stronger than usual was the rapport developed between the instructor and the group. Especially important was the assignment of writing which stressed the individuality of self-expression, where the student writer could really roam. Lastly, the small class size allowed an amount of criticism and revision of writing that was a more realistic approach to writing, in that each writer had more of an opportunity to turn in his own best work.

As an attempt to demonstrate their pride in "what happened" in Honors EH 140, the students assembled a sampling of their writing in Easy Writer, which was mimeographed and distributed to them and to interested faculty.

EH 141

A continuation of EH 140, this course was the study of various literary genres as the basis of expository writing, especially literary criticism and research writing.

For the Honors sections the instructor selected a well-known text that guides the student in learning how to read fiction. The class started with the study of the short story, using class discussion of stories read by all members and using panel discussion for stories assigned to small groups. In addition, two papers (one research) were written by each student. Unlike EH 140, in EH 141 the students did not evaluate each other's papers, because they did not feel competent to do so.

Poetry in the text was discussed by the class as a whole and also presented by individuals. Each student wrote three papers (one research), these more subject-oriented than critical. The students enjoyed the poetry selections in the text much more than the short story selections; they reacted dramatically to the poetry, maybe a result of the pop music lyrics on which they grew up. From references during class discussions it was obvious that they were reading other poetry beyond that assigned. An example of the impact of the poetry unit is demonstrated by the fact that a poem about the Women's Liberation Movement lead to the viewing of an educational film about Ibsen's A Doll"s House. Another poem stimulated a discussion which helped the class decide to see the controversial movie Joe. Both film ventures were so successful that the study of at least one film will be inserted into next year's EH 141 curriculum.

The study of the novel, because of time, was brief and rather informal. The instructor selected three novels which the criti s said college students everywhere were reading. No written work was assigned, and in the short discussion that followed, student reaction was only so-so. This experience, combined with the film success mentioned earlier, convinced the instructor to study fewer novels and more films next year.

In evaluating Honors EH 141, both the students and the instructor agreed that another textbook should be tried, because the present text's selections of short stories and treatment of how to read fiction were not as effective as they could be. Another change will be the planned study of film and a reduction in the number of novels studied. The instructor also plans to encourage peer evaluation of writing, which was so effective in EH 140. Lastly, the instructor has seen the need for some classroom work on research writing procedures.

GT 152

American Government I involves a study of the nature and classification of governments in general, including pre-Constitution and Constitution, and state constitutions and county and city charters. Also studied on all levels are the court systems, political parties, and elections.

As in EH 140, one reference text was used. In addition, each student subscribed either to Time or the National Observer (the choices were almost equal).

One of the main responsibilities each student undertook was to act as a consultant for at least two topics studied during the session. These oral reports were on subjects such as interposition, nullification, and the ICC. Furthermore, each student selected a current events topic for the session, and his duty was to analyze the news for the class as development occurred. Among the topics under consideration were St. Petersburg city government, the Middle East, music, theatre, and literature.

A second responsibility was two written exams done outside the classroom. One week's writing time was allowed for each. Research and documentation were necessary.

In lieu of final examination, each class member wrote a 3000-word paper on any topic included in the session's work, with the concurrence of the instructor. Again research and documentation were required.

Was this Honors course successful? Once again the student-evaluation was both objective and subjective. Of the thirty students in the two sections, twenty-nine requested permission to register for Honors GT 15). Two class members were counseled to leave the Honors program, according to effort and results shown in Session I. Both, however, sincerely pleaded for another chance, and in Session II they worked to their high capabilities. In the subjective evaluations turned in anonymously, the comments were overwhelmingly favorable. Students appreciated the atmosphere of the conference room and the small class size, both of which stimulated group discussion. They enjoyed the opportunity to use the periodicals as textbooks. Very important to them was the challenge to do research in some depth in topics of their choosing, within reason. In fact, they made good use of the Stetson College of Law Library and the Pinellas County Law Library, as well as our college's and our city's libraries. Their main negative evaluation was disappointment in a few classmates who did not adequately prepare reports on time.

The instructor discovered during the session that the two Honors sections were even more stimulating and challenging to him than he had expected. He saw a great change in the amount of class participation, especially in initiating discussion. The 75-minute period was a huge success with both students and instructor; a small incident demonstrates this: initially the students thought that a five-minute break would be beneficial to all, but as time went on, no one bothered with the break because the students did not want to interrupt the discussion.

GT 153

In American Government II the student studies the following aspects of national, state, and local governments: political parties and elections; executive branch; legislative organization; revenue and expenditure systems and practices; governmental functions.

Because the GT 152-153 courses are designed to be studied in sequence and because both the students and the instructor were so satisfied with their Honors GT 152 experience, the participants decided to follow the same format in GT 153. Each student continued to analyze the news in a chosen area, such as science and technology, medicine, United Nations, the executive branch (Florida), the executive branch (national), etc. In addition, each student acted as a consultant on a topic, choosing from among such as the committee system in Congress, the traditional role of the Vice-President, the text of President Nixon's State of the Union message (1971). Besides that individual effort, each class member also participated in a panel for topics like departments within the President's Cabinet, present suggested plans for changing the electoral college, and a critique of the national convention system for nominating the president.

The class requested a repeat of the two take-home essay exams and the research paper in place of the final exam, all three requiring documentation.

In summary, Honors GT 153 was very similar to Honors GT 152 because of course structure and because of student desire. For next year no major changes are planned.

Addition of Honor Humanities (HS 252) for 1972-73

Under the leadership of Dr. Edwin Stover, Chairman of the Humanities Department, St. Petersburg Campus, one Honors section of Humanities (HS 252) has been planned to begin in Session I, 1972.

Dr. Stover and Mr. Donald Musselman, instructor, will be seeking students who are creative in quality of mind, students who have inquisitive, imaginative, and inventive minds. Since this is a sophomore-level course, many instructors will have encountered this type of student. The entire St. Petersburg

faculty, through the faculty publications of The Link and the "Blue and White," has been requested to send qualified and interested students to Dr. Stover. There are no test scores or grades to limit qualifications for Honors Humanities; the only limitation is the class size of fifteen.

At the start the course will be unstructured. Through individualization of the learning situation, the students will determine both structure and pace. The course will be concerned with man's creative and speculative nature as these are reflected in the arts, philosophies, and religions and as they are reflected in aesthetic and ethical judgments.

Summary

Only through the leadership and commitment of the college's administrators, such as Dr. Philip Fredrickson, Dean of Academic Affairs, and Mr. E. L. Noel, Jr., Dean of Instruction, St. Petersburg Campus, was an investigation into the feasibility of Honors work begun. They, in turn, relied on the research of the Ad Hoc Committee on Honors, which was ably directed by Mr. Joseph Madden, Chairman of the Department of English, St. Petersburg Campus. The committee soon found that there was both a need and desire for Honors work at St. Petersburg Junior College. Implementation of the program in Session I. 1970, came under the direction of Mr. Madden (EH 140-141) and Dr. Joy Mitchell, Chairman of the Department of Social Sciences, St. Petersburg Campus (GT 152-153). As necessary as all of the aforementioned was, however, the ultimate success of Honors work came from the enthusiastic and inspirational instructional leadership of the two classroom instructors -- Mr. Donald Tighe (EH 140-141) and Mr. Earl Kohler (GT 152-153).

Conclusions

Many more junior colleges need to investigate the possibility of offering Honors work for the high school graduate who has demonstrated potential for academic excellence, so that he can achieve maximum development of that talent in his undergraduate work.

College adminstrators who contemplate Honors programs should be ready to "go the extra mile" in making concessions to scheduling, meeting place, instructor workload, etc. If Honors work is to be special, then special administrative arrangements must be conceded. Furthermore, it is impossible for a college to prepare an adequate Honors program without a minimum of one year's planning.

Curriculum supervisors must decide whether Honors work is to be special courses or special sections of standard courses (our preference is the latter). If Honors is to be special sections of standard courses, the aim should be qualitative, not quantitative: higher plane of achievement rather than "more of what regular sections do."

Finally, instructors who teach Honors sections must be secure not only in their subject area but also in themselves as individuals. They will be challenged by extremely intelligent and highly motivated young people who are adamant in some of their ideas. Instructors cannot be overly authoritative, or else small-group discussion will suffer; on the other hand, they must tactfully be able to wrest discussion from a dominant personality who may try to monopolize the dialogue.

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